

2015 Vermont Teacher of the Year, Rebecca Haslam – Acceptance Speech

Thank you.

This is such an incredible honor. It's so humbling to have been chosen to represent the state of Vermont and all the amazing teachers here.

I want to thank the State Board of Education, Members of the Agency of Education, and the Selection Committee for giving me this great opportunity.

Thank you Governor Shumlin, Mayor Weinberger, the other Vermont State Teachers of the Year, and the press for coming today,

and special Thanks to Jill Remick and Jay Hoffman for your guidance and support throughout this process.

I need to thank my family at St. Michael's College - Dr. Valerie Bang-Jensen, Dr. Jonathan Silverman, and Dr. Anne Judson, for starting me on my journey as a teacher 15 years ago , and for your continued support ever since.

I am so grateful to be able to pursue my passion at work every day. I want to thank some people who have supported me, encouraged me, and helped me sustain and realize my vision for teaching about social justice.

Thank you to Stephanie Phillips, for being determined to send me to the Summit for Courageous Conversations back in 2012, for believing in teaching about equity embedded in curriculum, and supporting it with the creation of the Social Studies coaching position.

To Henri Sparks, for supporting me as an emerging leader on the Equity Council and for his guidance and partnership designing our Equity Conversations for professional development.

To Leslie Colomb, for supporting everything I do, for always making time for me, and for believing in my potential within and beyond the classroom walls.

To Jane Miller, for her mentorship, literary expertise, and maternal care as my teaching partner for three years.

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Thank you to all my colleagues here at Champlain Elementary School, and to my grade level teammates, Nancy Leon, Jeannine Galusha, and Penny Stearns.

And mostly, I want to thank my family, my husband, James Haslam, who pushes me every day to exceed my own expectations, encourages me even when I want to give up, for his loving patience, his passion for justice, and his partnership in life. And thank you to my sweet baby boys, Will and Reed for reminding me every day why I do what I do.

Needless to say, I wouldn't be here without you. All of you. Thank you to all my past students, my class this year, and to all our wonderful Champlain families for your trust, support, partnership, and dedication to children.

I am grateful for this honor and at the same time, I understand it comes with a responsibility to advocate for the amazing work that we all do each and every day.

I know firsthand the impact of not having an inclusive education, not ever seeing myself or people who looked like me reflected in textbooks, or even portrayed in fiction. I know what it feels like to be hypervisible all the time, yet never encouraged to speak up, and I recognize that all of us have an opportunity to present a different reality to our students today.

Public education is the foundation of democracy, and it is our moral imperative to make it available to every child, starting in the formative years. We need to fully fund early childhood education, close the opportunity gap, and provide equal access to a foundation of success for all children.

Especially in an age of vast inequity, we need to prepare our young people to be able to participate in a democratic society and meet future challenges that await them with strength of character, confidence, and a sense of justice. In order to stop the perpetuation of underachievement of students of color, we need to own the gap. It's a huge challenge, but I've beared witness to 11 years of progress in Burlington already, and I plan to continue to help lead us into the future.

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Our country still has tremendous amounts of progress to make with regards to social justice. On a national level we are dealing with serious systems of racism and oppression, and excessive force in communities of color. How can communities combat racism and start to make progress? By teaching the next generation.

The solution starts with us! I am proud to be a public school teacher in Vermont. We have a lot of work to do in order to create the just, equitable world we envision for our children, but we have never been better positioned to do so than we are now.